

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EASTERN
EUROPEAN CHURCHES

from the East-European desk of the World Council of Churches

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Metropolitan Nikolai's Message of Greeting to the Participants
in the Meeting of the Central Committee of the World
Council of Churches

Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsy and Kolomna sent to the participants in the meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches held in Rhodes (August 1959) the following message of greetings. For the first time in the World Council history two observers of the Church of Moscow - Father Protohierei V. Borovoi and V. A. Alexeev - attended this important meeting.

"Dear friends and Christian brethren!

Remembering my encounter and discussion with representatives of the World Council of Churches in Utrecht last year, I take with great pleasure this opportunity to address to the meeting of leading workers of the ecumenical movement a word of welcome, sympathy and good wishes.

I greet the members of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches first of all as champions of Christian reunion. We Orthodox Christians are in great sympathy with the ecumenical movement because we believe that our western brothers honestly aim at overcoming the destructive separation in faith "in order to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". (Eph.4:3).

Our sympathy with the ecumenical movement, which finds its expression in the Church's prayer "that they may all be one" under our Lord Jesus Christ, is inspired by the fact that in spite of separation, all Christians continue to pray "Our Father"; that all of us keep the Word of God, which is given to us in the Bible and in the Holy Gospel, and that we are all bound together by love for our Lord Jesus Christ. May therefore this common Christian treasure serve our unity in the love which is strong enough to enlighten all Christians by a true faith, thus enabling them to communicate in the life of the Church.

We Orthodox cannot but sympathise with the measures taken by the World Council of Churches and directed towards the solution of many social problems of our time. The fight against social untruth because of our realisation of the truth of Christ, the efforts to help the under-developed countries, the condemnation of colonial policy and race discrimination - all this is worthy of the active support of all Christians in accordance with the demands of Christian conscience.

Our common moral task is the struggle to stop the nuclear weapons tests and to achieve their complete abolition. Therefore we Orthodox entirely share and support the efforts of the World Council of Churches towards this aim.

In the meantime, I think it necessary to express the hope that the social concern of the World Council of Churches will not overshadow the main task of the ecumenical movement, which aims at the unity of faith that is divided by differing interpretations. We Christians must stand above the political contradictions of our time and give to the divided peoples an example of unity and peace, brotherhood and love, removing ourselves from all self-sufficient isolationism and unfriendly relations to each other.

With this in mind I again address my greetings to the participants of the meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church and express my satisfaction that its representatives have, for the first time, the possibility of observing the work of the ecumenical organisations, thus contributing to our mutual understanding.

I pray for God's blessing upon the work of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and wish the meeting blessed success in the solution of the questions they have to deal with, and I beg you to believe in our collaboration in everything which can serve the great task of re-uniting the Christians as well as the strengthening of peace among the nations."

Signed: Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsy and Kolomna
Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox
Church.

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The July number of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" (No. 7, 1959) contains the following article on questions about the universal Church which are of concern for Orthodoxy.

The author of this article is Professor N. Uspensky of the Religious Academy in Leningrad. It deals with the problem of 'Sobornost' - the concept of catholicity held by the Eastern Church in the following way.

Sobornost
by Professor N. Uspensky

The problem of the catholicity of the Church (Sobornost) must be considered in the light of the writings of the Early Fathers.

The word "Sobornost" comes from the Slav word "Soborny", which is equivalent to the Greek word "Katholikos".

This word has always been the most suitable expression for the teaching of the Church, which includes the whole Christian message. The word 'Sobornost' (=katholikos) thus came to have a special significance for the church.

But the concept must be based on the writings of all the Early Fathers, not only of one of them.

One of these writings is that sent by St. Ignatius to the Christians in Smyrna, admonishing them to remain in the unity of the Church. For Ignatius this unity was "not merely a solidarity of thought and action, as in human institutions ..." "The unity of the Church is a special unity bestowed by grace, without which the Sacraments would be ineffective. The power of grace inherent in this unity springs from the mysterious alliance between Christ and the Church. That is why Ignatius calls the Church "catholic".

"Where the Bishop is, there the congregation will be; just as the (catholic) Church will be where Christ is. 'Sobornost' is the active, vital union between Jesus Christ, the Bishop and the believers. If this unity is broken, arbitrary separation from the episcopate deprives those who have broken away of membership of the "catholic" Church, i.e. the Church in which Christ dwells.

St. Polikarp of Smyrna (who died in 156) expresses himself in a similar way, speaking to the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia and in fact to all churches, which together make up the "catholic" Church.

The 'Sobornost' of the Church includes all its living members and all the members who have died in Christ; they are all one in God's Church and unite with the Apostles and the righteous in praising God.

Every numerically small and territorially limited church or congregation is part of the "catholic" Church if it "belongs to God", i.e. "if its members are united in the bond of grace and remain in Christ". Even the small churches and congregations are therefore the "catholic" Church, however small they may be geographically. To distinguish them from the "catholic" Landeskirchen, Polikarp of Smyrna calls the totality of these churches the universal (ecumenical) Church.

Similar ideas are expressed in the letters of St. Justinian the Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Irenaus of Lyons (who died in 202), Cyprian of Carthage, Cyrill of Jerusalem, and others. These writers all described the universal Church in the same way as St. Ignatius.

The Church's 'sobornost' is therefore an abstract concept, not a geographical one. 'Sobornost' is a quality which is inherent in the Church, because it is the Body of Christ.

At the time of the Apostles and their first disciples (like St. Ignatius, and St. Cyprian) who are known as the Nicean Fathers, 'Sobornost' expressed itself in the unity of faith between the people and their hierarchy (the Apostles and their successors), so that separation from this hierarchy was equivalent to separation from the Church. But when the apostacy of some bishops from the faith of the Apostles became more frequent, and the need arose to explain this apostolic faith in order to avert heresy, the churches did so at the Episcopal Council of the whole Church, the Ecumenical Councils. And unless the authority of these Councils was recognised by all the church, they could not retain it. (An example of this is the "Robber Council" at Ephesus in the year 449, which was not universally recognised, although numerically its composition was irreproachable).

At the time of the Ecumenical Councils 'Sobornost' found expression in the exposition of religious truths and the condemnation of heresies by the episcopacy of the whole Church, the decisions of the Councils being recognised by the whole of the clergy and by all believers.

During the centuries which followed the Ecumenical Councils the 'Sobornost' of the Church was expressed (as it still is today) in loyalty to the above basic principles of church unity, i.e. the retention of the Apostolic Succession, in the common confession of faith (as expressed in the Confessions and Dogmas of the Ecumenical Councils), and in the retention of the principle of 'Sobornost' - teaching dogmas and healing heresies only 'soborno' (i.e. ecumenically)

The question naturally arises here: what is the relation of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, the Calvinist Church, to the ecumenical (catholic) churches? A great deal has been said on this subject ... The Orthodox Church (especially the Russian Orthodox Church) deplores both the separation between the Roman and the Greek Churches in 1054 and its own separation from the Roman Church when the latter (which is only a national church) began to propose new dogmas and to deviate from the principles of 'sobornost'.

But the Orthodox Church also deplores those tendencies in the Roman Church which led to the rise of new Christian confessions in the 16th century; these new confessions did not even possess the first characteristic of 'sobornost' mentioned by St. Ignatius, namely the hierarchy of the Apostolic Succession. But up to the present time the Eastern Church has not condemned "ecumenically" either the hierarchy of the Roman Church, or Roman Catholic Christians (as it condemned the heretics and schismatics in the past), because in its view the Roman Catholic Church has not hardened its attitude against the ecumenical Church as the heretics did. The Orthodox Church believes that "although ^{some} of the branches be broken off... God is able to graft them in again." (Romans 11: 17-23)

USSR

Important Discoveries at the Cathedral
of Saint Sophia in Kiev

According to information given by V. Lazarev at the Xth International Congress on Byzantine Studies at Istanbul, frescoes and mosaics of great value for the study of Russian art and Byzantine art in Russia in the 11th century have been discovered at the cathedral of St. Sophia at Kiev. This cathedral was built between 1037 and 1046. A big restoration project was started in 1952, in order to restore the original appearance of the architecture and to clean the mosaics and frescoes. The Ukrainian Government has allocated large sums of money for this work, which is being done under the supervision of the Russian Academy of Science and the Academy of Architecture in the Ukraine.

The specialists want to remove any elements which have been superimposed on the original building, and then to preserve it in its original form.

The restoration of the mosaics is now completed. Like the frescoes, they are the finest examples of 11th-century mosaic work. The archaic forms are carried out in colours of extraordinary beauty, and an amazing variety of tone: 25 shades of green have been identified, 33 shades of brown, 19 of yellow, 19 of gold, 13 of red and 8 shades of grey. Altogether 130 different shades of colour have been discovered.

It will take several more years to restore the frescoes, because they are covered over with 3 to 5 layers of paint. But those which have already been uncovered are very well preserved.

According to V. Lazarev, the 19th-century scholars were mistaken in believing that this 11th-century mosaic work in Kiev, Sicily and Venice was purely Byzantine. Further research on the discoveries at Kiev reveals that these mosaics present special local characteristics which are not found in purely Byzantine works of art. The Byzantine style has been modified and adapted to the local conditions, and artists came from Greece to collaborate with local artists. Thus in Russia the Greek artists drew on the help of local artisans to make the enamel (according to V. Boguchevitch's researches). They also employed local people to execute the frescoes and mosaics. The cathedral at Kiev thus gave rise to a variety of the Byzantine style definitely marked by the local history and art. This is the first thing proved by the discoveries.

(From "Mitropolia Moldovei si Sucevei"
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USSR

Church and Peace

Two hundred priests from the diocese of Moscow attended a meeting organised in the hall belonging to the eparchy on the 10th anniversary of the movement for world peace.

On this occasion Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsi and Kolomna described the history of the Stockholm Peace Movement since its inception in 1948 with a peace-message from Vrotslav (Poland).

In the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarch" (No. 6, 1959) A. Kasem Beck gives the following account of the Metropolitan's speech: "The Metropolitan described the work for peace done by the Russian Orthodox Church, particularly stressing the fruitful activity of the Patriarch Alexis. The Metropolitan pointed out that already at the 1952 Congress of the World Peace Movement in Vienna, the Russian Orthodox Church had played a prominent rôle as a pioneer in the task of preserving world peace. The Metropolitan also advocated a project for holding a Christian world congress for the preservation of peace, to be attended by some of the great religious associations such as the World Council of Churches (the ecumenical movement)."

USSR

Working for Peace

"Bratskij Vestnik", the organ of the Gospel Christians and Baptists in the USSR (published in Moscow), has a leading article in its last number entitled "Working for Peace - a sacred duty incumbent upon the Christian Churches."

This article speaks of the incarnation of Christ, and describes the spiritual basis of the Christian life in relation to peace:

"One of the reasons why Christians are not sufficiently enthusiastic in the struggle for peace is the following consideration: God is strong enough to preserve peace on earth and not to permit anyone to infringe peace out of wickedness. But if war breaks out after all, they say that it was bound to come because it was in accordance with God's plan for mankind. They say, Christians must not act contrary to the will of the Almighty, which we must perform in all things, both large and small.

The great question which we have to face today is this: can war possibly be in accordance with God's plan, during the New Testament aeon in which we live? The wars mentioned in the Bible took place in Old Testament times, when the commandment to demand an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth still held good. But after Christ came to earth with the New Testament commandment - the commandment of love, after his sacrifice on Golgotha which brought salvation to all men, and after he had pronounced the commandment expressing the greatest love for the whole human race, "Go, and preach the Gospel to all nations!" - after all this there cannot possibly be any more wars in accordance with God's plan. For wars not only destroy men's bodies; they also destroy their immortal souls...

Why do we not make more effort to cooperate with God in maintaining peace and averting war? This work for peace is so essential today; it must be undertaken not only by statesmen and politicians, but also by the hundreds of millions of people who compose the family of mankind. Last but not least, this task must be undertaken by all the Christian churches...

But we do not want the Christian churches merely to join in the angels' Christmas song, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men". We want them to do everything possible so that this peace can take possession of our world."

USSR

Co-existence between Religion and Atheism

In his pamphlet "Does God exist?" (edition "Molodaia Gvardia", 1958) E. Kolman writes: "Among other things Christianity brought to Russia the art of reading and writing."

He goes on to say that Christianity places its hopes in God, whereas Communism pins its hopes on men. "Christianity tells man to bear whatever comes to him; whereas Communism calls him to struggle." "Christianity and Communism are therefore opposites." But this polarity does not prevent "believers and unbelievers, Communists and non-Communists, people with different ideologies, of different race, nationality and language, from being able to live together in peace and friendship."

But why does Communism oppose religion? Some believers get annoyed because we do anti-religious propaganda. Sometimes they don't see why the atheist want to convince them that there is no God and that religion is a mistake. "What concern is it of yours whether we believe or not?" they say, "why do you oppose religion, which is a consolation to those who believe in it?"

This view is beside the point. Of course, no one in the Soviet Union may forbid another to believe in any sort of God, nor to confess any religion. The Soviet Constitution forbids us to make fun of the feelings of religious people or to hurt them. But the Communist Party insists "that the errors of religion should be patiently explained and convincingly refuted." "We Communists are convinced that faith in God is harmful, that it is a form of self-deception which weakens people. It is therefore our duty to help people to liberate themselves from religion. We do not despise religious people, but we must feel sorry for them. And because, in our opinion, faith in God is contrary to our Communist ideology, there is of course no room in the Communist Party for religious people. Belief in God is incompatible with the call to cooperate in the Komsomol" (the Communist youth organisation)...

Belief in God and all forms of superstition are blows to man. They prevent people from understanding what is really happening; they see everything distorted. "A religious person cannot understand properly how natural phenomena are inter-connected, because he imagines that they are all controlled by a mysterious Power." A religious person can never achieve full consciousness. He can never be an active member of our society. He cannot march forward in the ranks of the pioneers of Communism. It is not easy to re-educate old people who are religious, though it is possible. But it is our task to see "that not a single young worker, not a single member of a kolchose, not a single employee nor a single student believes in the Supernatural."

They must accept the high teachings of Marx and Lenin, for this is the only way to understand how human society develops, and what rôle is played in it by religion.

USSR

Overcoming the traces of religion

The periodical "Voprosy Filosofii" (No 8, 1959) replies to questions on religious matters which have been sent to the editor. The questions are not answered in detail, but under the heading "Overcoming the traces of religion which still survive in the USSR" the paper makes basic statements showing that "the Soviet Union has embarked upon a period when socialism is being developed into communism."

The transition from the socialist to the communist order necessitates not only extending the material, technical bases but above all giving the workers a higher level of consciousness. "The sharper their consciousness, the more effectively can the gigantic schemes for realising communism be carried out."

The question of educating the Soviet people in communism, especially the young people, therefore assumes great importance. "Raising the communist consciousness to a higher level involves above all strengthening their political consciousness, educating everybody (especially the young people) to realise the ethics of work, striving indefatigably to promote the idea of international friendship, friendship within the ranks of proletarian internationalism, eradicating the last vestiges of bourgeois ideology, and actively overcoming religious prejudices."

The overwhelming majority of Soviet people have broken away from religion once and for all (says the paper), and turned their backs on the religious institutions.

"The Soviet Union is the first country in history where atheism has succeeded in dominating the masses, although a certain amount of religious ideology still remains."...

"The idealist philosophy (seen as a whole) is religion's ally" because "it ultimately confirms the Church's view of life." Idealism springs from the same origin as religion, and has the same tasks and aims. Idealism carries out its ideological task in a more delicate way than religion, better adapted to the requirements of science; religion tackles the same task in a rougher, simplified form. However, idealism cannot be regarded as exactly the same thing as religion. The teachings of idealism include (even if in a distorted form) great problems of science, of human history, in short "man's capacity for understanding his environment". Idealism is connected with cognition; religion on the other hand is not a form of human cognition. Religion does not want to investigate phenomena. It merely demands unconditional, blind faith in God's providence. This extremely primitive attitude is still being attacked by various religious bodies in the USSR.

The position of atheism (in Soviet Russia) has become consolidated. But the activities of the religious bodies have expanded considerably during the last three or four years to keep pace with it. Consequently "some believers are much more interested in religion than before..." The increased activities of the religious institutions do not necessarily signify an increase in religious faith." "Wherever cultural enlightenment is systematically carried out (especially atheist propaganda on a scientific basis), the churches and sects suffer a set-back." On the other hand "the churches and sects do not suffer any reverse if the anti-religious propaganda is inadequate." In such cases it was not difficult for the believers to win over people "who had become detached from the collective"... The final victory of socialism, the indefatigable effort to raise the material and cultural standard of life of the workers, and the systematic educational work of the communist party have drawn believers away from religion in its various forms.

This (says the periodical) explains why the preachers of all confessions have become increasingly active, because their primary concern is to retain their influence over believers and to ensure that their lives are rooted in religion.

The preachers are also anxious "to win back those who have broken away from religion and left the Church, and to strengthen the faith of those who are vacillating." "But this increased activity on the part of the clergy does not mean that religion is growing stronger, nor that its rôle in socialist society is increasing in importance..." "The Tserkovniki (church-people) must realise that their activities are shrinking every year." That is why the clergy are trying to do everything to strengthen the piety of the believers. Thus in the churches today a sermon is usually preached after the liturgy, followed by baptisms, marriage, ceremonies, etc., the whole thing accompanied by explanations concerning the meaning of these rites. Moreover the bishops have begun to visit the parishes in their diocese more than before, in order "to strengthen them in their prayer-life." More attention is also being paid to psychological ways of influencing people in favour of religion, for instance through choral singing. The sects are paying special attention to individual spiritual care; They try to isolate believers and non-believers from the social life of the broad masses in the Soviet Union, in order to turn them into "active preachers of God's Word" and thus strengthen their own ranks.

Religion will lose its influence over the masses "as socialism grows stronger, as the material and cultural standard of life rises, as technics make progress, and as the public bodies become more influential in their attack on religion."

The theologians maintain that religion will continue as long as mankind exists. "It is not difficult to refute this idea that religion cannot be eradicated. For if that were the case, everyone would be religious." But there are far fewer believers in the world than non-believers. And the number of non-believers is increasing every year, in every country, quite apart from the Soviet Union with its vast preponderance of atheists.

"Believers are beginning to interest themselves in the criticism of religion and in scientific-atheist propaganda. They are beginning to put questions to the atheist teachers, which they never did three or four years ago."

According to "Voprosy Filosofii", the demand for anti-religious literature is growing in the villages and factories.

The break-away from religion is a painful process... An example of this is an article in the paper "Leninets" of Jan. 11th, 1959, written by a woman-worker, N. Tshukhnina: "It is difficult for me to write this. My family will condemn me (because I have broken away from religion). They will call me a renegade, a disgrace to the family. I love them very much, but we have quite different views about life. Whenever I attend a meeting of your religious sect, I see how sadly you look at me. But I am your daughter and should like you to take an interest in the way I live and work... But all you have to say is that the end of the world is coming and the Day of Judgment."

"Voprosy Filosofii" says: "Not only are ordinary believers rejecting religion; so are people who have been preaching religion for years. The priest N.N. Spasskij, formerly pastor in the town of Michailovsk, writes in an open letter to the Bishop of Astrachan and Stalingrad: "My conscience as a citizen compels me to give up my position as a clergyman, even at this late time of my life, rather than to continue deceiving people, telling them to have faith in a reality which simply does not exist, and thus isolating them from life."

The churches and sects "hold three or four meetings a day, while the communist meeting-rooms are closed, and the young people don't know where to spend their free time." The sects now try to attract the young people by arranging dramatic and musical activities "for they spare no time or trouble in their efforts to win souls." But this only produces an artificial sort of religion.

The more firmly communism is established, "the more actively will the believers participate in it, and the more quickly will the last vestiges of religion be eradicated." The major task in this process is assumed by science. "Science enables people to perceive more and more the laws which govern the evolution of nature and of society, to utilise the forces of nature in the service of society, to strengthen human consciousness and to promote culture. At the same time science eradicates the last vestiges of religious faith, which debase man to the position of God's servant. It is only science which can solve the questions which preoccupied religious believers in the past. Today many believers are so dissatisfied with the explanations given in the Bible about the creation of the world that they are turning to science for the true answer."

"Believers are different today from what they were 15 or 20 years ago." "Religion can no longer satisfy people" because it cannot give a satisfactory answer to innumerable fundamental questions; in spite of this many people have not yet made up their minds to abandon their religious faith completely. Others refrain from breaking their connection with religion because they are afraid there might be something in it after all. If the religious view of life is to be completely eradicated, "the propaganda carried on by scientific atheism is of decisive importance."

USSR:

The Influence of Social Conditions on the
Religious Outlook in Bourgeois Society *

According to the Marxist concept of religion, religious ideology is always dependent upon social conditions. It was only by analysing the constant changes of ideology caused by changes in religious outlook that Marx and Engels were able to find a scientific answer to the question, how to wipe out religion.

Following the example of Marx and Engels, Lenin also showed how social conditions influence religion. He insisted that the anti-religious struggle must be based on the materialist concept of the origins of religious belief.

This leads to a further question: what are the facts on which one should base one's judgment of the effects of religion on the broad masses of the people? The most objective information is provided by the statistics concerning religious affiliation in the different countries. The replies to questionnaires about the religious membership of individuals are less reliable.

These methods of investigation include the interesting publications of French Catholics (such as F. Boulard, A. Dansette). This erudite circle gives information about certain questions, in order to prove that the influence of religion is increasing not only in France but also in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Western Germany and the U.S.A. Their purpose is to justify the necessity for religion. One of the most eminent representatives of this method is Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr of the U.S.A. These bourgeois sociologists are honest enough to admit that religion has lost influence in France, etc. In France 94% of the population is baptised, it is true, but very few of them attend church; in Paris and Marseilles only 13.6% of the population, in Toulouse 14.7%, in Lyons 20%.

In the rural areas the figures are somewhat higher. But even there only 45% of the French people show any interest in religion. And if church-attendance is analysed and divided into classes, in Marseilles only 13% of the working class, of whom only $\frac{1}{2}$ % are men, attend church. In Rouen only 3% of the working class (out of a total of 9.5% of the population) attend church; and among the dock-workers no one goes to church at all.

In Paris 20% to 30% of the bourgeoisie go to church, and nearly all of them are married in church. But in the proletarian districts of Paris only 4% to 6% of the people attend church, and only one-third of this number get married in church.

The Church, especially the Catholic Church, suffers because it has lost its influence with the working class. On the other hand many of the bourgeoisie, who had to a large extent become estranged from the Church, are returning to it.

On the whole, therefore, religion is losing ground, in fact so much that the de-Christianisation of France, and especially of the working class, is realised even in church circles.

* Extracts from atheist publications

In England the situation is the same. (See H.G. Wood: "Belief and Unbelief since 1850", Cambridge 1955).

However, the fact that people do not attend church does not by any means mean that they are atheists. In the U.S.A. religion today is experiencing a "boom". In 1776 only 4% of the total population of the U.S.A. belonged to religious organisations. By 1900 this figure had risen to 36%, and in 1957 to 63% (with a total of 104,189,000 members). During the same period the number of Protestants increased by 64%, the number of Catholics by 54%, and the number of Jews by 22%. The greatest increase has been among the Baptists and the so-called "Holiness Sects". During the last three years church-taxes in the U.S.A. have risen from \$49.- to \$57.- per head.

As J.H. Nichols writes (in his "History of Christianity from 1650-1950") there is less and less room for "godless" people in the U.S.A., "godlessness" being regarded as equivalent to communism and a-morality. The Americans' national slogan is "In God we trust", which includes trust in "divine matter" (according to a saying of Franklin Roosevelt).

These and other figures show that the imperialist bourgeoisie "exploits religion so as to throw dust in the people's eyes, in order to persuade them to rescue Christian civilisation from atheist communism". "But many theologians and bourgeois sociologists point out that this religious renewal, if it does not affect the whole of life, cannot yet be described as a genuine return to religious belief. True religion does not consist merely in "joining a Church, just as one joins a club or a trade-union" (F.A. Norwood, "The Development of Modern Christianity since 1500", New York, 1956). Although 95% to 97% of Americans state that they are Christians, nevertheless 53% of them are convinced that this should have no influence whatsoever on their political or business activities.

The revival of religious life in the USA does not therefore imply an increase in religious fanaticism. It is merely the outcome of the efforts of a hypocritical bourgeoisie. There is plenty of evidence to prove that the increase in church-membership has been accompanied by conditions which "have alienated the broad masses from the biblical-Christian ideology" and have therefore "weakened the quality of religion as such."

In actual fact the religious renewal in the U.S.A. is nothing but "a mixture of Calvinism (17th century), deism (18th century), rationalism (19th century), and the restlessness of the 20th century" (M. Lerner, "America as a Civilization"). Nowhere in the world have so many institutions been set up "to create a new, purified, simplified religion adapted to modern life" as in the U.S.A. with its innumerable Christian "denominations" which all try to offer "something new" and thus to open the way to religious modernism. Thus D. Howlet (in "Man against the Church", Boston, 1954) urges the setting up of "a universal Holy Church, which will keep pace with the growth of scientific knowledge".

This is really a protest against religion in the form of permanent effort to seek a "new true religion".

According to bourgeois sociologists the "religious renewal" is "a sign that public life today is passing through a crisis" (Carr, "Analytical Sociology", New York, 1955). A "progressive economic order and policy" would not provide any solution to this crisis. What people need in order to surmount this crisis is rather a faith, an all-embracing, creative faith, which will enable them to forget "their disappointment about the cold war, McCarthyism, etc."

Religion in bourgeois society today is marked by two tendencies. On the one hand it propagates scientific-technical achievements and knowledge, independent of their source, which helps to strengthen the scientific view of life. On the other hand the capitalist order turns people into slaves. It shows them only a very vague indication of their future. Hence "the call to return to religion as the old consolation of the past."

Both these tendencies are clear in the capitalist order of society. Like the two poles of a magnet, they are unable to cancel one another out.

The only way out of the dilemma is "the struggle of the workers to combat the inadequate capitalist order, the struggle for socialism". It is only on this basis that the struggle of science against religion can be completed.

The interaction of these two tendencies gives rise to many features in the development of religious consciousness in bourgeois society which at first sight seem paradox.

The "religious boom" in America is undoubtedly superficial in nature. There have been other outbreaks in history of religious fanaticism such as Christianity, combined with a general "escapism", i.e. with a deep religious protest against the realities of the time. The present religious "boom" differs from similar expressions in the past not so much through its fanaticism as through "its conscious or unconscious hypocrisy" - because the religious "boom" is merely an extension of the boom in industry.

The personal qualities of the individual preachers are of no importance. As the bourgeois sociologists themselves admit, the "boom" in religion is accompanied by increased secularisation of life as a whole, i.e. a constant decrease of true religion. The "boom" itself is an expression of this secularisation, which is unfavourable to true religion. The paradoxical thing about it is that the all-pervading process of secularism is taking place within the framework of a religious "boom". (W. Herberg, "Protestant - Catholic - Jew").

Moreover "the crisis of capitalism has not produced any new religion". The impersonal, mechanised capitalist oppression which exploits all the latest inventions creates a spiritual vacuum - a longing for religion among the masses of the people; but it has not produced a religion.

What is really happening is that the old Christian institutions are being diluted with "rationalism" and "modernism" especially in the U.S.A. (i.e. the different church trends are expressing their dogmas extensively).

The numerous typical American sects which have sprung up during the last hundred years, such as "Christian Science" or "Moral Re-argument", have not produced any new religious system. Their teaching is based rather on stressing one particular aspect of Christianity (consolation through faith, moral edification, Messianism, etc.). The religious way of thought is disintegrating and breaking up into its basic elements. But this does not mean that religious fanaticism cannot revive. One has only to think of the flourishing sects, which owe their success to the ignorance of the backward working class; these sects have always exploited the forces of reaction for their own purposes. "On this soil fundamentalism also flourishes, and Billy Graham reaps his harvest." However, in the "normal" bourgeois society only a comparatively small proportion of the population believe in fanatical obscurantism.

In religion, which is bound up with tradition, people lose their individuality. They humble themselves not only before God, but also before "those whom He has appointed to rule on earth" (Hitler, etc.). But such phenomena are not "true religion", just as fascism is not "a return to personal independence" (of higher powers) in the full sense.

The general decline of religion under the influence of "science, industrialisation and secularisation" is subject to certain setbacks. Among the bourgeoisie, especially the petty bourgeoisie, there are many people who are undoubtedly shocked by the mass-destruction of oppression and impoverishment due to the economic crises, wars and revolutions which accompany the decline of world capitalism. In their despair the people seek refuge in religion. This gives an opportunity for many activists in the church to speak of a "spiritual revival of the masses".

"The break-away from religion in bourgeois society has become possible owing to the revolutionary movement within it." Of course every worker who participates in the struggle for socialism is an atheist. But the struggle to establish a genuinely humane order of society involves extricating oneself from slavery to ideologies such as religion; "people are gradually realising this more and more."

The struggle between atheism and religion all over the world centres not around the question of the creation of the world or of the development of organic life, but around the question: what possibilities are there to build up a social order which will be free from social injustice and will provide the bases for the free development of the individual.

"The genuine forces of religious propaganda, from the most rigid fundamentalists to the most radical Christian Socialists, are trying today to show that ultimately the concept of original sin destroys all possibility of really liberating man." The link between atheism and socialism clearly tends to make the bourgeoisie revert afresh to religion. Hence the weakness of "Bourgeois atheism".

USSR

"A Monument of Human Stupidity"

The following news-item was published under this title in "Komsomolskaia Pravda" on the 9th August, 1959.

"In the Vedenski cemetery there is a vault belonging to the Erlanger family. The particular merits of this family in the eyes of God and men are not known. But the vault is interesting not only because of its architecture, but particularly because of the decorations on its walls. They are not frescoes by Theophan the Greek, André Rubliov, Raphael or Michelangelo, but ordinary inscriptions in the Russian language.

"These inscriptions cover the pillars and the walls, and they are all prayers to Almighty God for purely earthly things. Most of them are concerned with family affairs, secret wishes, love-stories, etc. For instance, "Help us, O Lord, to model our lives. Sacha and Dusia." "Grant, O Lord, that Thy servant Valia may have an heir from Thy servant Michael". Poor Valia (writes the "Literaturnaia Gazeta") "even in biblical times God did not send heirs, except in the case of the Virgin Mary - and even that is a very obscure story." Another unknown person prays, "O God, help me to kiss Natasha once again." But God seems to be deaf and Natasha remains obstinate (comments the "Literaturnaia Gazeta").

"The materialism expressed in some of the prayers is striking. One prayer, written in a firm masculine hand, reads, "Help me, O God, to win in the Volga lottery". So as not to doubt God's help, the writer does not venture to give the number of his lottery-ticket.

"The inscriptions include many written by boys and girls: "Help me, O Lord, to do my lessons well so that I may go up into the 6th form", writes a schoolgirl named Ludmilla. Her contemporary Anatol also prays earnestly for the same thing; apparently he was faced by the sad prospect of having to stay down in the 5th class. The verb employed is grammatically wrong, and misspelt. A prayer containing so many mistakes "would hardly be accepted in the heavenly office" (writes "Literaturnaia Gazeta").

"In the chapel attached to the Erlanger vault is a yellowish mosaic of Jesus Christ "looking sadly down at all these inscriptions and holding his hands out helplessly as if to say: there is no limit to the stupidity of men" (comments "Literaturnaia Gazeta" in conclusion)."

USSR

Religion and Science diametrically opposed

In the September 1959 number of "The Communist", published in Moscow, one of its editors named I. Kryvelev writes on the relation between "Faith and Science" from the standpoint of Marxist ideology. He criticises "all forms of Apology for religion which are based on reason". For instance, he disagrees with the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" (No 9, 1957) when it says:

"Science has its limits. Science deals only with what man sees, feels, and hears and with the conclusions which he draws from his own observations. But there is another sphere, a different kind of knowledge - the sphere of faith. Apart from the visible world there is an invisible world whose radiation can be apprehended by man. Faith opens up to us a spiritual world, an eternal world, and thus answers the great problems of human thought."

Kryvelev also criticises the ideas of Catholic, Protestant and other clergy who exercise an influence which is both theological and scientific.

In conclusion he speaks of the Dean of Canterbury (England), Dr. Hewlett Johnson, whom he approves as a progressive theologian. "We regard churchmen of this type with respect. They struggle for peace and play an important part in maintaining peace and international friendship. Nevertheless there are fundamental differences between our Marxist view of life and all forms of religious-idealist ideology..."

"Our fundamental rejection of religion is by no means equivalent to a "political" atheism, which springs from the demands of the political struggle.

"When such an eminent figure in public and religious life as Dr. Hewlett Johnson imagines that dialectic materialism can be reconciled with Christianity, with all due respect to this eminent man we are obliged to point out that his theory is completely invalid." Religion and science are based on entirely different forms of cognition: the former is based on faith, the latter on exact knowledge.

USSR

How I became an Atheist

"The years seemed very long when I was training to become an Orthodox priest. I was looking for truth, for the pure, holy faith in God the All-highest, Almighty and Omnipresent, the Father, the Saviour and friend of mankind", writes Valentin Pakhomov, novice of the Bishop of Astrachan and Stalingrad, in "Komsomolskaia Pravda" (13th August 1959).

"During my childhood I came to the conclusion that the religious life was the expression of the reality which I sought - the world of love and friendship in which the priests were models of hard work, modesty and sincerity ...

"At that time I did not pay much attention to the obvious discrepancies between the different books of the Bible. For instance, the Old Testament tells us to demand "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth", whereas the New Testament urges us not to render evil for evil but to turn the other cheek.

"Which Testament was I to believe, the Old or the New? I couldn't decide. But because I regarded the New Testament as the book of the Christian faith, I decided to take it as infallibly true and to dedicate my life to the service of the holy Church.

"I went first to Zagorsk near Moscow. There I soon found that the life among the Christian brotherhood was very different from the life of Christ described in the New Testament...

"I ate in the refectory. The food was as good as in a modern hotel. I began to think, 'so that is how the priests live - not by joy in the Lord but by filling their bellies with good things.' It made me sick to observe how these idlers spent their time, and I left the Abbey sad at heart, and entered the monastery of Pskov-Potseri.

"There the Prior, Archimandrite Pimen, gave me a kind welcome. I told him that I had read a lot about the lives of the saints and had decided to follow a strict monastic life. The Prior did not conceal the fact that life in the monastery was full of hardships and privations, demanding the renunciation of all worldly goods. I replied that I felt called to serve God and was ready to endure anything. So I was taken into the monastery and my monastic life began.

"But I could not stand this 'divine test'. I soon left the monastery and went to Astrachan. I was still a fervent Christian and anxious to serve God. But in Astrachan too my eyes were soon opened when I saw what life was really like in the monastery.

"In Astrachan too the brothers had mistresses, and indulged in alcohol to excess. The Bishop's secretary made a lot of money by re-selling photos which cost 50 roubles for 1500-1700 roubles..."

The reason why Pachonov finally left the Church is described by himself as follows. "The priests deceive the people and get what they can out of those who believe, by promising them a future place in the kingdom of heaven. They even go so far as to maintain that the latest achievements of science and technics (especially the Sputnik) is not the product of human genius; according to them, it is a sign of God's providence, which permits men to penetrate into space."

On the 21st June, 1959, he broke away from the Church. "I told the Bishop, 'I'm leaving you for good. Your life disgusts me, with all its paraphernalia and its hypocrisy. The teaching contained in your holy books has the practical effect of turning people into slaves who blindly accept all your crazy ideas which you pretend to be divine...' At first the Bishop wouldn't believe it. He thought I was drunk and instructed a priest to continue the conversation with me the next day...

"I have broken completely with the past, and am now free to enter a world of work and happiness."

The Mystery of the Nuns from Bergamo

A number of monks disappeared this summer in Vienna. A Franciscan arrived there from Munich - and simply disappeared. A Dominican arrived there from Paris - he disappeared too. As for the Jesuits from Italy, they are disappearing in flocks ...

The good Catholics racked their brains as to how monks could disappear in Vienna.

Hundreds of them were probably being kidnapped by participants in the Vienna Youth Festival, who used their holy monk's skin for making drums!

The anxiety reached its climax when ten nuns from Bergamo disappeared in Vienna in broad daylight. They had arrived by train from Rome. People had noticed the ten black figures on the platform. From the station they went to a quiet hotel and went up to their rooms. After which they simply disappeared. The ten nuns were no longer there!

What happened to the ten nuns from Bergamo? According to "The 19th Century",*when they reached Vienna they changed into ordinary clothes (nylon stockings, high-heeled shoes, etc.) and these lively, well-dressed girls soon made friends with the other participants. Perhaps the ten nuns had the courage to amuse themselves on the model of "The Merry Widow"? Or they may have decided to leave the convent before it was too late.

No. The monks and nuns mixed with the 18,000 young people at the Festival in order to do anti-communist propaganda among them. "The group were as clever as Fifth Columnists in pretending to be Communists and getting into conversation with other young people", writes "The 19th Century".

The girls from Bergamo who spoke Russian, Polish and Czech had the job of contacting the American delegates to the Festival, and telling them that they had just arrived from the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia. They were to tell the Americans that this was the first time they had ever worn stockings and civilian clothes. In their own countries the women could not afford such luxuries as a pretty dress or high-heeled shoes. They were to pretend that they were Roumanians, Hungarians and Bulgarians, to make contacts with the delegates from Africa and England, to describe to them the 'unbearable' conditions in their home-countries, and ask them for help. In short, these nuns were to tell the delegates to the Youth Festival a lot of humbug about life in the socialist countries, like the propagandists in the cold war. They were also to try and influence the young people from Eastern Europe. According to "The 19th Century" there were 300 of these young monks and nuns in Vienna during the Festival.

But on some young people the opposite effect was produced, as is shown from a letter from Italy addressed to the editor of "Komsomolskaia Pravda":

* Italy

"Dear friends. We enclose an article from the conservative-bourgeois paper "The 19th Century", published in Genoa. From this article you will see the vile methods resorted to by the society in which we live in the West. Bourgeois morality has touched the very dregs of stupidity and disintegration. One need only look through the reactionary Italian periodicals to be convinced of this."

"Please tell the young people in the Soviet Union what the atmosphere is like in the West. Millions of young workers in the West are full of enthusiasm for you, as you go on from success to success. Those who speak ill of you are only miserable, shameless, irresponsible pygmies."

We cordially embrace you.

A group of Italian students."

It was therefore our friends in the West who disclosed the divine mystery of the disappearance of the monks and nuns.

USSR

Abyssinian Order for Patriarch Alexius

Patriarch Alexius of Moscow and all Russia has conferred the first-class Order of the Grand-Duke Vladimir on the Emperor Haile Selassie of Abyssinia. The monarch of Ethiopia presented the Patriarch Alexius with the Abyssinian Order of the Trinity and a golden cross.

USSR

Church for sale in Holland

"Literaturnaiia Gazeta", the organ of the Soviet Authors' Association, in a recent article on Holland, gleefully comments on the fact that in Barneveld a church is advertised for sale. The Dutch correspondent comments, "After reading this advertisement, who can refrain from exclaiming, 'Long live the pious Government of Holland, which protects us from godless Bolshevism!'"

The advertisement reads as follows: "Church building for sale in Nieuvestraat, Barneveld. Can be inexpensively converted into business premises. Also suitable as a warehouse."

POLAND

Polish Workers asked about Religion

The Kattowitz communist paper "Trybuna robotnicza" recently conducted an enquiry about religion among 700 young workers in Gleiwitz, living in workers' hostels. 2.6% stated that they were "enthusiastic and active" Christians, 29% described themselves as "practising Christians", 28.5% were "Christians, but not regular church-goers", 10% were "Christians, but never went to Church". 9.5% stated that they were "not believers".

POLAND Three new translations of parts of the New Testament

The periodical of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburgian Confession in Poland has published an article by Professor Jan Szeruda of Warsaw on a new Polish translation of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. The article states that since 1947 no less than three new translations of parts of the New Testament have been published in Poland. A translation and commentary on the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles by Pastor Feliks Grylewicz appeared in 1947 in Katowice in Warsaw in 1957, and a translation of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark by Professor Vladyslav Witwicki in Warsaw in 1958. The latter, entitled "Good News", is the work of a well-known translator of Plato and a psychologist, who is now an old man.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA Christians and the "Glorious October Revolution"

What is the attitude of Christians to the October Revolution? This question is tackled by Dr. J. Berger, Professor of Systematic Theology in Modern, who writes:

"As we know, every revolution is an event which involves not only changes in the social order but also employs very different ways of introducing those changes... What a tremendous event the October Revolution was! Although it had many victims, it is still celebrated by a large section of the human race and regarded as an extremely important event. Millions of people recognise it as the source of all the benefits enjoyed by the working masses.

"During the first world war the whole position of mankind, in Europe and throughout the whole world, was transformed in a trice by the October Revolution, which will be the determining factor for the future of the world."

Cirkoven Listy
Nov. 1958

YUGOSLAVIA Archimandrite Kliment Maleski Becomes
Bishop of the new Orthodox Church of
Macedonia

Archimandrite Kliment Maleski has been consecrated as Bishop of the new Orthodox Church of Macedonia. The consecration was carried out in Skoplje by Patriarch German, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The ceremony was also its official recognition by the Serbian Church, from which it separated last year.

In accordance with a recent agreement, the Church of Macedonia receives its independence under Metropolitan Dositej Stojkovic, who was elected last year. On the other hand it recognises the Patriarch of the Serbian Church as its Patriarch.

ROUMANIA

15 million souls in the Orthodox Patriarchate

According to an article by Professor M. Sesan of Sibiu, there are nearly 15 million souls in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Roumania today, in twelve eparchies.

The Orthodox Church of Roumania has nearly 10,000 priests who are trained at the theological institutes at Bucarest and Sibiu. Each of these institutes has 30 teachers and can take 600 students. In addition there are six metropolitan seminaries with the same number of choir-schools, and special training-courses for the priests. Patriarch Justinian has given fresh impetus to monastic life. At the present time there are 7,000 monks and nuns living in 150 monasteries and convents. Most of them work on a communal basis in the different workshops (weaving, pottery, printing and sculpture). The monks have their seminary in Neamt, and there are seminaries for nuns at Agapia and Hurezu. In addition training-courses are organised in all the large convents and monasteries. There are also some small religious institutions, which have now been brought together in larger convents and monasteries.

The theological press of the Roumanian Orthodox Church publishes nine papers: the 'Telegraful Roman' which has existed since 1853, in Sibiu; the 'Biserica Ortodoxa Romina' which has appeared in Bucarest since 1883, with a circulation of 12,000; the new series 'Ortodoxia, Studii Teologice'; the 'Mitropolia Moldo vei'; the 'Mitropolia Ardealului'; the 'Mitropolia Olteniei'; the 'Mitropolia Banatului'; the 'Glasul Bisericii' with a circulation of 2,500 each.

The salaries of the priests, building subsidies, scholarships, etc. are covered by the state. During the past ten years over 100 new churches have been built. Study-courses are held in the local parishes, stress being laid upon social action which helps to strengthen the state.

The Roumanian Orthodox Patriarchate maintains close relations with all the Orthodox sister-churches, and endeavours to achieve better understanding with Anglicans, Old Catholics and Protestants. Since 1949 the Orthodox Church of Roumania has sent delegates to the conferences of the World Peace Movement, and since 1958 it has been represented on the Committee of the Christian Peace Conference in Prague. At its meeting on the 3rd July, 1959, the Holy Synod decreed that the 6th of August should be observed as a Day of Atonement for Hiroshima, and that prayers for world peace should be offered that day in all the churches.

HUNGARY

Teachers urged to criticise each other

At a conference of communist teachers of the Komitat Szabolcs Szatmar, criticism was directed against "the obsolete ideology" of some of the Hungarian teachers (reports "Kelet Magyarorszag"). Sandor Nagy, head of the propaganda department of the party organisation,

complained of the conflict between the syllabus "which tries to teach the socialist view of life" and the attitude of the teachers. The conference urged the teachers to criticise one another more. The younger teachers must have the courage to criticise the older ones "for going to Church".

HUNGARY

New Constitution for Hungarian Reformed Church

A new constitution which will take into account "the changes in the social order" is being prepared for the Hungarian Reformed Church.

Five special commissions have been at work since last April on the new document, Bishop Elemer Györy told a recent meeting here.

He said the new constitution is necessary because "the church is no longer a national church in a capitalist environment. Its task now" he declared, "is to give service in a state where socialism is being established." He said that leaders of the Reformed Church have "repeatedly stated" that they recognize the need for a new constitution.

A draft of the document is expected to be submitted to the church bodies concerned for ratification before final action is taken.

HUNGARY

How the Hungarian Bible Council serves the Hungarian Churches of other countries

The Hungarian Bible Council, which is a united enterprise of the Hungarian Evangelical Churches, is not content with the work of supplying the member churches with Bibles. It also regards it as its task to give Bibles to Hungarian Protestants who live abroad. In the last four years, including the transactions now in progress the Council has supplied about 25,000 Bibles to the Hungarian congregations in Roumania, Czechoslovakia, Yougoslavia and Holland. Since most of these congregations belong to the Reformed Church, the shipments have been made from the quota of the Reformed Church in Hungary.

HUNGARY

The meeting of the Reformed and Lutheran Committees of the Peace Council

The Reformed and Lutheran Church Committees of the National Peace Council held a joint meeting on the 21st of August at the Reformed Theological Academy of Budapest. Bishop Elenér Györy, of the Reformed Church, Ministerial President of the General Convent, acted as Chairman and the officers included other leading personalities of the Protestant churches. The participants at the meeting,

about 150 delegates, gave a warm ovation to the administrator of the Hungarian Orthodox Church, Protoierei Dr. Feriz Berki, who in recognition of his services, had recently been presented with a pectoral cross studded with diamonds by Metropolitan Nicolai.

After the opening address by Bishop Gyory an invited speaker gave a survey of the current international problems.

Then Kalman Huszti, Secretary of the Reformed Committee, presented his half-yearly report on the work of both church committees. Acting on a motion by Pastor Dr. Andras Heken, Secretary of the Lutheran Committee, the two church committees passed a joint resolution requesting the National Peace Council to ensure that the county peace committees arrange bi-monthly meetings at which the pastors would be informed by invited speakers about the international situation and the tasks of the peace movement.

In his closing address Bishop Szamosközi spoke about three main factors which operate in bringing about the summit conference of government heads: 1) the shift in the balance of power to the disadvantage of the cold war; 2) the fact that the peace diplomacy of the Soviet Union has made planned preparations for mutual understanding and 3) the fact that a very significant clarification has taken place in people's thinking concerning the issues of war and peace. "The first two factors are the objects of our thanksgiving", said the Bishop, "and as regards the third factor, churchmen too may make a significant contribution to the shaping of the right thinking. In order to do this, all pastors must seek reliable information about internal and international issues."

HUNGARY

Let us pray for the peace of the world

Bishop Kaldy, of the Southern Lutheran Church District, and deputy Bishop Jozsef Szabo, of the Northern Church District, who during the illness of Bishop D.Dr. Lajos Vetö, are carrying out the functions of the Bishop in this church district, addressed a joint circular to all congregations of the Lutheran Church in Hungary calling attention to the 14th anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima by the first atomic bomb on the 6th of August 1945.

The circular stresses the significance of the first atomic bomb. It has since become clear that the turning of Hiroshima into an "experimenting laboratory" did not hasten the end of World War II but actually started a new war. the cold war. The use of atomic energy for military purposes has not secured world peace but has in fact rendered it more precarious than ever before. We therefore call the members of our congregations to worship on the 9th of August that we may unite in penitence and intercession. Let us pray that those Christian brethren who bear direct responsibility for throwing the first atomic bomb may unite with us in penitence and in the struggle for peace. Let us pray that Christians all over the world may go forward in the work for peace.

HUNGARY

The Hungarian Protestant Delegation about
their Visit to the Soviet Union and China

Bishop Dr. Tibor Bartha, of the Transilvian Church District of the Reformed Church, President of the Ecumenical Council of Hungarian Churches, has been on a tour of nearly five weeks in the Soviet Union and China, as a member of a delegation invited by the Protestant Churches of China. On his return to Hungary the Bishop made the following statement to the representative of the Hungarian Telegraphic Bureau:

"Among other places, we visited Moscow, Leningrad, Irkutsk, Peking, Nanking, Shanghai, Shanyang and Anshan. Both in the Soviet Union and in China we were warmly welcomed by the church leaders and the congregations. We gave many addresses and preached at church services. We were deeply impressed by the fervent religious life of the congregations and the resolute way in which churchmen contribute to the task of building up society and defending peace. We have reached the fully unanimous conviction that we must give our full support to the socialist work of national construction and to the efforts of the peace camp. We paid friendly visits to the Leningrad Theological Seminary of the Orthodox Church and, while in China, we also met some leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and Buddhist community. We agreed that the service of the true interests of our people and of humanity, in socialist society, has brought closer together not only the different Christian denominations but also the religious organisations. Both in the Soviet Union and in China we received particularly deep impressions of the purposiveness and constructive power of those hundreds of millions that have been mobilised to build up the new social order. We had the opportunity to see in practice the meaning of the solidarity and brotherly relations that exist between the socialist peoples. The Chinese speak with deep gratitude of the support which the Soviet Union gives them in founding factories, and industrial centres and in training experts. In the factories we visited in China people happily led us to machines manufactured in Hungary and spoke with sincere gratitude of the help which our country has given in the reconstruction of China. In summing up our experiences I may say that the socialist camp possesses infinite power and vast potentialities. This experience gives confidence and strength to all those who feel their responsibility for our people, the future, the nations and human progress. At the same time, all that we have seen will inspire in us a keener sense of responsibility and more devotion to the cementing of relations with the Protestant churches living in the Soviet Union and in China and also to the strengthening of friendship between our peoples".

The miraculous Icon
Story by W. Tendriakov

Among the papers recently published by the atheist press in the USSR, special prominence is given to the story of "The miraculous Icon". This is not only because the story is well written (its author is W. Tendriakov) but also because it includes conversations with an Orthodox priest which are bound to attract the attention both of religious and of anti-religious people. It shows the tension between believers and atheists, and the way in which the religious question is accentuated by the interplay of genuine religion, superstition and radical atheism. The story as such is fiction. *)

The following (abbreviated) conversations between the teacher, Praskovia Petrovna, the local communist leader and the priest Dimitri seem clear in their implications.

* * *

Rod'ka Guliaev, a fatherless schoolboy in the village of Gunnishtshe, discovers an icon of St. Nicholas buried in the sand by the river. At home his mother and grandmother tell him that it is a miraculous icon which has been lost since the first years of the Revolution, and that thanks to Rod'ka it has miraculously "reappeared".

"Blessèd art thou, Warwarushka", said the pious neighbours to Rod'kas mother, "because thou hast this blessèd son ... We ought to kiss his hands."

* * *

The church of "St. Nicholas on the Bridge" stands outside the village of Gunnishtshe by itself on the moor. Today it is closed. It was built 150 years ago to commemorate the discovery (by a shepherd called Panteleimon) of an icon of St. Nicholas which had fallen into the bog - no one knew how. When Panteleimon found it he knelt before it and prayed for the recovery of his mother, who was ill. She immediately regained her health, and after that the icon of St. Nicholas was revered as having miraculous properties.

* * *

Gunnishtshe used to be much visited as a place of pilgrimage. All over Russia the pilgrims had collected money in order to build the church.

Then in 1929, when the miraculous icon was to be placed in the local museum as a religious curiosity, it disappeared. It was not found until now, when Rod'ka discovered it by the river. There were rumours that it had been stolen, when the village priest was denounced by the government as "a kulak agitator", and was unfrocked.

*) The ikon is not only a visual aid in the Orthodox spirituality. It has also a liturgical and doctrinal value teaching certain truths, otherwise incomprehensible.

But "religious superstition" interpreted its disappearance in a different way. What connection had it with the queer noises heard in the church every night, like wailing voices? Anyway, the icon had now appeared again. Was that a good or a bad thing? First it had been discovered by Panteleimon, and now it had been re-discovered by Rod'ka in the same village of Gumnishtshe.

* * *

Rod'kas mother, and especially his grandmother, "forced the blessed boy" to wear a little cross round his neck. Rod'ka protested, but it was hopeless to struggle against "the old women". Against his will he had to obey. Otherwise his grandmother threatened to keep him away from school, where he and his comrades "learned about the future". His mother and grandmother were constantly looking to see whether he was wearing his cross under his red tie, like a good boy. Then one day Rod'ka's comrades discovered the cross, as they were swimming. They made fun of him, saying he had put it on because he was afraid of going into the water. Rod'ka turned on them and the result was a fight, in which Rod'ka gave his friend Wenka some hard knocks. Rod'ka ran off and threw the cross away.

Since that day Rod'ka's world has been divided into three parts, from all of which he is trying to escape: his home, the street, and the school.

At home his grandmother won't give him any bread unless he first crosses himself. In the street his playmates make fun of him, calling after him "Rod'ka wears a cross like an old woman". And at school everyone knows the story.

* * *

So now Rod'ka is alone all the time.

One evening when a lot of religious people were visiting his home, he heard them say, "We must get our local Commissioner to re-open our church, now that the miraculous icon has returned to us."

And then Rod'ka heard someone say, "There's something wrong with Rod'ka."

* * *

Next day his mother discovered that he was not wearing the cross. And he did not cross himself before breakfast. Rod'ka wanted to run away to the next village 12 kilometres away. He couldn't stand it at home any longer. But then he thought, "Grandmother will beat me; is that so bad? And the boys at school will laugh at me; well, let them try! No, I'll stay where I am." For Rod'ka wanted "to make a success of his life, like the rest of his schoolfellows."

And then he met an old woman called Jerelikhha who whispered to him, "Our little angel, God's chosen one."

When his teacher, Praskovia Petrovna, met him she said, "Come into the teachers' room with me". The following conversation there took place:

P.P. "Why did you treat Wenka like that? ... I've heard about it from your schoolmates; it was from cowardice that you hit him! That hurts me, little brother. Yes, it hurts me when my pupils have no confidence in their teacher ... But I realise that it was difficult for you ..."

Rod'ka hung his head assentingly.

P.P. "Is it your grandmother?"

R. "She won't let me come to school any more ..."

P.P. "Did you have to cross yourself?"

R. "Yes"

P.P. "And you didn't want to?"

R. "No"

P.P. "All right, Rod'ka, we'll put that right with your mother... Only don't put your fists into action again. You must make it up with Wenka."

* * *

Later on in the Guliaevs' hut the teacher met the old priest from the next village, Father Dimitri, who said to her, "You have heard about the discovery of an old miraculous icon of St. Nicholas... For us believers that is an object of great value, in fact it is of great value for the whole community."

P.P. "A relic of that kind may belong in the church, but not in the home!"

Father D. "In what church? The church at Gumnishtshe is closed. I long to see it re-opened, but there seems little prospect of that."

* * *

Discussion between Praskovia Petrovna and Rod'ka's mother:

P.P. "Which is more important for Rod'ka: his grandmother's care, or going to school? - If you want to believe in religion yourself, you can pray with your old mother, but leave Rod'ka in peace!"

Mother: "I was an atheist once, but then I thought perhaps my little son would have to suffer for that reason. You don't believe in God, Petrovna, but perhaps He is listening to us at this very moment"...

P.P. "The age of the 'true believers' is over. One nail drives the other out ... You must change your ideas, Warwara."

A serious quarrel begins between the mother, who thinks of Rod'ka's future and the grandmother, who wants to command in the house." The grandmother blames everything onto the teacher, because she said, "If the boy doesn't break away from God, there will be a disaster!"

* * *

And Rod'ka? He had never thought seriously about God at all. At school they said it was all an old myth, and there was no God. So Rod'ka had not thought much about it. He associated God with his grandmother's everlasting mutterings, and his mother's tears, with something infinitely boring. But now, without his wanting it, his whole life was "filled with God". Rod'ka had to believe it, if the grown-ups said so. "People had believed in God for thousands of years! Leo Tolstoi had been a seeker for God! And if Tolstoi sought God, then he must have believed in Him... Why did no one believe in God, now except old people? His grandmother believed in Him, his teacher did not. His teacher was cleverer than his grandmother; but wasn't Tolstoi cleverer than his teacher?"... And how could one explain the strange noises at night in the church? "I want to hear them for myself", Rod'ka decided, "I want to know whether there really are noises there or not." So having made it up with his old friends Wenka and Vaska, the three boys decided to find out for themselves that very evening. Anxiously but courageously they crept up to the dark church-building that night and listened. Sure enough, uncanny noises were clearly audible inside it. Terrified, trembling with fear, the three boys rushed away.

* * *

Rod'ka's future was ruined. It was no use thinking of becoming a sailor, as Makarovitch (President of the kolchosc) had been. Rod'ka had to keep on praying ... For he had discovered the sacred icon! Didn't that mean that God Himself was behind him? Perhaps he really ought to do everything that his grandmother told him? Rod'ka now wore a new cross which had been "brutally forced upon him", and he was often absent from school.

P.P. "Rod'ka, why didn't you come to school?"

Rod'ka loses his temper and shouts in despair, "The devil take you all. I can't stand it any more!"

P.P. "Come Rod'ka, let's go".

But Rod'ka didn't listen. He had only one idea in his head: to destroy the icon and put an end to this impossible situation.

When his grandmother saw Rod'ka splitting the icon with the hatchet, she seized the splintered fragments and struck Rod'ka with them, like one possessed. Waska (one of Rod'ka's schoolmates) saw the scene through the window. Rod'ka was half out of his mind and ran down to the river to drown himself. He was found soon afterwards unconscious on the river-bank, not far from the spot where he had found the miraculous icon. The instinct for survival had made him strike out for the bank.

Rod'ka was taken care of by the teacher. "You animals", she said, "what have you done to him?" Rod'ka's mother could no longer live together with the grandmother and Rod'ka. The teacher said she was not afraid of bringing the whole story to the attention of the authorities.

But she reproached old Stephan, one of the leaders of the kolchosc, for saying nothing about the state of things in Rod'ka's home. Stephan replied, "I'm not responsible at all. I have too much to do as it is,

looking after the work of the kolchosc. I've no time to bother about saints. That's outside my province."

P.P. "That's just it. You are only interested in seeing that people do their work for the kolchosc."

* * *

Rod'ka soon got better in the hospital in the neighbouring village. And it was explained to him that it was the echo of an express train which went past about midnight, which caused the uncanny noise in the church.

* * *

The dramatic story of "the miraculous icon" concludes with a conversation between Praskovia Petrovna and Father Dimitri, who called to see her.

Father D. "You mustn't be surprised that I come to see you. If you don't mind, let's sit down and talk for a moment."

The teacher looked enquiringly into the priest's face.

Father D. "I am very depressed and sad about the accident which occurred."

P.P. "Have you come to see me just to express your sympathy?"

Father D. "No; I've heard that you want to bring a lawsuit against the old woman for striking her grandson. Do so, if you must; but is it worth while stirring up all this dust? Is the matter sufficiently important? An old woman who has lost her reason is dragged before the judge because she causes trouble in her family. And the boy is already out of danger."

P.P. "So you are afraid of the scandal?"

Father D. "I admit that this story does not give me great satisfaction. I will try to clear up the situation in Rod'ka's home. I hear that the mother and daughter won't live together any more. The question is, what is to become of the grandmother? I could take her into my church in a neighbouring village as a cleaner."

P.P. "On one condition, you mean?"

Father D. "Yes, I'm afraid so. If you will give up the idea of taking legal action against the family."

Father Dimitri hung his heavy head and waited politely for the teacher to answer.

"A clean, decent, gentle man who knows how to control his feelings and his impatience", thinks P.P. She says:

"So the person was right who told me yesterday that you wouldn't like certain facts to come to light, any more than a mole likes sunshine."

Father D. "A public scandal never did anyone any good."

P.P. "No, Father Dimitri, it's only people with guilty consciences who are afraid of what others will think. But you and I will cooperate in solving the problems in this family."

* * *

First conversation between Praskovia Petrovna and Father Dimitri the Orthodox priest.

Praskovia Petrovna looked at the priest more closely. He sat before her, an old man with a somewhat troubled, grandfatherly expression and full mouth who certainly appreciated a soft bed, good food and decent conversation, a messenger of God, the head of a group of religious believers who were doomed to disappear, but refused to do so yet. Who was he? Had he really spent his whole life serving the things which meant everything to her, Praskovia Petrovna? How was he able to reconcile the contemporary view of life with the obsolete old notions about God's commandments, the naive legends about the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the tents in Paradise.

She turned to him firmly, "Father Dimitri, shall we be quite frank with each other?" Without showing the least surprise, Father Dimitri nodding, indicating nothing but complete attention.

P.P. "As an atheist I realise that we have freedom of conscience in our country. No one can be forbidden to worship any god he likes. But it is forbidden to force religious beliefs upon anyone."

Father Dimitri assented.

P.O. "My pupil Rod'ka has been forced by his family to wear a cross, and to say prayers. He learns one thing at school, and the opposite at home. Either the school will educate him to deny God, or his family will bring him up as a double-faced hypocrite. There can be no compromise. Let the parents believe whatever they like. But the future of the children does not belong only to them. Parents like that are social criminals ..."

Father D. "And what have I to do with this?"

P.P. "Need I explain that to you, Father Dimitri? You have a great deal to do with it, for you are the spiritual shepherd of this family. That is why you are by no means unimportant to us."

Father D. "You say, parents like that are 'criminals'. A criminal is someone who breaks the law. But have these people done anything illegal? Legal experts have been arguing for years as to whether a woman is to be considered as a murderer if she destroys the life of her unborn child. And if abortion is considered to be a form of murder, then from what date: a week after conception, 2 weeks,

or 7 months? Are not methods of birth-control also a form of murder, in that case? The legal experts cannot decide where to draw the distinction between what is legal and what is illegal. Is it illegal for a child to ask his mother, 'Mother, is there a God in heaven?' You will admit that a mother who believes in God herself can only give one answer, 'Yes, there is a God.' And if the child persists in asking what God is like and what He does, the mother is bound to explain about the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, and the Last Judgment. And by that time faith has already taken root in the child. Then come prayers, wearing a cross, and so on. Where is the distinction to be drawn between what is legally permissible and what is forbidden? How can the present case be described as 'criminal'? If I understand the matter rightly, you are less concerned whether the boy was forced to pray, than whether he was persuaded to do so. If I'm not mistaken, the important thing for you is to preserve your pupils from religion?"

"You certainly know all about the Soviet Union", thinks the teacher in surprise, realising how silly she has been to challenge this man, with an entirely different mentality from her own, to a frank talk.

P.P. "There are many crimes which are not defined in any particular paragraph of the law. But that does not make them any less harmful for society."

Father D. "Everyone sees things from his own angle. You see them like that, and I see them like this. But the law is binding upon us all. Believe me, the law is not on your side. For if the law were to try to define the question of religious education in the family, it would find it impossible to decide what is permissible and what is not. That is why the law is wise enough to leave decisions about religion to the family, without help from the state. Whether you appeal to the court of law or to the militia, you cannot expect to receive any help. In calling this matter a "crime" you are therefore exaggerating, for it does not present the slightest danger to the state. Believe me, I also have the interests of the state at heart."

Father D. took a cigarette out of his case and looked at Praskovia Petrovna in a fatherly manner. He smiled politely. She never took her eyes off him. She was thinking, "This priest not only knows all about Soviet legislation; he has also accepted the contemporary view of life, I must try to trip him up. He is in favour of progress and world peace, and always ready to decry foreign capitalism. He agrees with everything because he only wants one thing: that Rodia Guliaev should believe in God Almighty, should tolerate all evil, and recognise the powers of heaven and earth... The real struggle is about this boy. Does Father Dimitri realise that we are enemies?..."

P.P. "Your exposition of the law is unnecessary, for I'm not thinking of running to the law or to the militia. There is another force which will certainly be on my side, and that is public opinion."

Father D. "Perhaps. As far as I am concerned, I shall not stand in your way."

Conversation between Praskovia Petrovna and the local communist leader

The conversation which Praskovia Petrovna had with the local Communist leader, Kutshin, between her first and second talk with Father Dimitri is also instructive. Kutshin thinks of nothing but getting in the harvest. "He is too busy to bother about international problems."

K. "They tell us to step up the anti-religious propaganda. How are we to do that? Get one speaker after another to come and tell us whether the end of the world is at hand? In my experience it is usually only atheists who attend such lectures. And even if some religious people come along too, nothing much is achieved."

P.P. "Why doesn't that cause you more concern? You are the head of propaganda here, after all, one of the intellectual leaders of the Party. Yet I have never heard you express any anxiety on this point before. You spend all your time worrying about fuel and corn, but you overlook the most important factor of all - the way people think."

K. "No, we don't overlook the way people think; sometimes it's a burning problem. For instance in Uchtomskij the old men and women persuaded the young people to take part in a crusade in honour of some old saint - or it may have been a new one. Who had to pay for that? Those responsible? O no, they got off scot free. It was the Secretary of the local committee who was blamed; and myself, because I'm responsible for the anti-religious propaganda."

P.P. "Quite right".

K. "Yes, but one must realise that our local committee consists of ordinary people, and that they cannot perform miracles. For 1,000 years people in Russia have believed this eye-wash, this myth about God. For 1,000 years! And then you come along and say, 'Comrade Kutshin, head of the propaganda section, use your brains, discover some miraculous means of getting rid of all the religious mud which fills the heads of believers about a supposed kingdom of heaven, so that they are as transparent as glass.'"

P.P. "Who is expecting you to do that all at once? You have been in that job for four years, and others had it before you. Was this problem less acute then than now? Have you anything to be proud of? What have you achieved?"

K. "We have achieved a great deal ... At that time the members of the kolchose only received 300 grammes of bread for a working day. Today they receive five times as much!"

P.P. "Don't let us talk at cross-purposes. What has it to do with bread?"

K. "A lot, because bread, corn and fuel taken together represent a struggle against religion. You know that yourself! The old method of taking the priest by his beard and throwing him out of his church has long been condemned as harmful. We don't attack religion publicly now, but we are persistently working against it. But in one or two years or decades we cannot eradicate ideas which have flourished for thousands of years. You can't pull down a huge tree that has taken centuries to grow, just with your bare hands. You have to attack it at the roots."

P.P. "All that is easy enough to say."

K. "No, we allow ourselves to make very few generalisations about religion today. We must succeed in making the very last old women put her faith in us, instead of in the Almighty. That means, we must show what we can do. And facts are the best means of persuasion: first a piece of meat in the soup, then warm clothes for the winter, then wireless sets, electricity, books and films. Those are the things which speak for us, and God can't do anything against them. Look and see if you can find any believers in the village. Perhaps an old woman is still praying secretly in a corner? But the old church festivals when everyone got drunk are things of the past. Why? Because people have more faith in the President of the kolchoses than in the mercy of heaven. Unfortunately there are not enough of us to do this propaganda. You expect us to help you, but we expect you to help us. There are hundreds of people like you, Praskovia Petrovna, in our villages - teachers, agricultural experts, doctors. But in the local committee we are only a small minority. There is a whole army of people like you. Why don't you do anything?"...

P.P. "You need only tell us, 'the time has come to act' and we shall act, not all of us perhaps but a great many..."

K. "You wait for orders. But those old women didn't wait for orders when they gathered round the miraculous icon. Anti-religious propaganda must become an inherent part of the conscience of every half-educated person."

P.P. "That sounds all right ... But what are we going to do? What is to become of Rodia Guliaev? I'm his teacher, after all."

K. "The only possibility I see is to take Rodia away from his home for a time, until the general excitement has died down. Then we can come to an agreement with the mother, if not with the grandmother."

P.P. "I could take him to live with me."

K. "If that is not too difficult".

P.P. "Not for me, but for the mother and grandmother. They may appeal to the court of law."

K. "Good, let them appeal to the law, then the whole story will become known, and there might be an open struggle."

P.P. "But then all the mud will be thrown at me".

K. "No, they won't dare to do that. These religious people always keep very quiet. Father Dimitri will be the first to calm Rod'ka's people down, for he hates public scandals. Take the boy to your own house, Praskovia Petrovna. We shall mobilise the komsozol and our district press."

Second conversation between Praskovia Petrovna and Father Dimitri.

They met on a country road. Father Dimitri was wearing "a thick mackintosh, similar to those worn by state officials" and driving a small vehicle. Praskovia Petrovna got in beside him.

Father Dimitri expressed his regret that she had been attacked by a believer in a drunken condition, on account of the Rod'ka affair. "Don't condemn him; he deserves pity, not condemnation".

P.P. "I don't bear him any malice."

Father D. "The people here are not bad, they are kind and hospitable, only very obstinate."

P.P. "I haven't noticed that they are obstinate."

Father D. "Yes, for instance they keep on urging me to re-open the church at Gunnishtshe. They won't listen to my objections."

P.P. "Does the church disturb you?"

Father D. "No. I am a servant of the church and it would be a sin to pretend that I would not like to see this church re-opened."

P.P. "Then you ought to be glad that the people are so obstinate about it?"

Father D. "The trouble is that it is impossible to re-open the church of 'St. Nicholas on the Bridge'. We shall not obtain permission to do so. If this empty church were being used as a storehouse for grain the situation would be different, though even then it is not certain whether permission would be given. But it would certainly be much easier."

P.P. "Why? Isn't it easier to re-open an empty church than one which is being used for other purposes?"

Father D. "No, because in the latter case we could suggest making an exchange. We could build a large, modern silo and get the church back instead."

The teacher again looked attentively at the priest, with his modest but dignified manner. "He has influence not only through his prayers to the glory of God", she thought. "While the kolchoses authorities in Gunnishtshe cannot raise the funds to build a sports club, it is possible to rebuild or restore the village church, merely so that Rod'ka's grandmother need not walk 12 km. to the church in the next village, but can put her penny in the box on the spot. For this purpose people are prepared to contribute hundreds of thousands of roubles. And Father Dimitri, who has no public responsibilities on his shoulders, does exactly as he likes among his congregation."

Father D. "One truth is as old as the world, Praskovia Petrovna, and that is that good conquers evil. That is why everyone must do his utmost. You do it in your way and I in mine, as far as I can."

P.P. "What do you mean by that?"

Father D. "That I feel that you dislike me".

P.P. "Does that worry you?"

Father D. "It is disturbing to know that a worth-while person regards one with dislike. There are all kinds of people among the clergy. There are the clever ones who warm their hands in the congregations; and there are people without education whose outlook is very narrow and who have no special ideal; but there are others who are whole-heartedly devoted to working for good. You don't believe in Christ, and perhaps I too believe in him with some reservations. But if, through the name of Christ, I can inspire good feelings in people, why should there be anything to object to about that?"

It was a challenge requiring a frank reply, and Praskovia Petrovna decided not to evade it. "One must oppose it because you appeal to people in the name of God and of Christ."

Father D. "Isn't it all the same whether good feelings are inspired by God or by something else? The main thing is that they are inspired!"

P.P. "No, it's not the same! Doesn't it say in the Bible that 'the Lord God made coats of skins, and clothed Adam and Eve' (Genesis 3, 21)? God clothes, God feeds, God wants ... Be good, for I, your God, am present everywhere. But now man has become man, because he has achieved everything himself with his own brain and hands. By bringing God into things all the time you deprive people of the right to decide themselves what to make of their lives."

Father D. "How do you mean that we deprive people of that right? Let them cultivate the fields, build factories, have children, and in all this accept the discipline of the great and righteous God, who permits no evil."

P.P. "Accept the discipline! Why do you think that people's morals must be ruled with a rod of iron? Why do you think that people do good only because they are afraid of some Almighty Power, and not because they can perceive for themselves the necessity for good and the harmfulness of evil? As a teacher I know that one cannot educate children in fear. But you try to educate people by intimidating them. That is dangerous. Rod'ka's mother has spent her whole life in fear and trembling before God Almighty. That has not helped her to become purer and finer in character than others who liberated themselves long ago from religious fear."

Father D. "The behaviour of a silly old woman does not prove that man should live without faith. As you yourself have perceived, faith in God can help man, though this does not overlook the fact that other things may be useful too. For instance, during the war I strengthened the faith of my congregation in the victory of the powerful Russian army. That was not merely a spiritual consolation. My Orthodox brethren raised 200,000 roubles for the defence of our country. This money certainly purchased more than one cannon."

P.P. "I admit that it was useful. But what a lot of harm you did to people too."

Father D. "What sort of harm?"

P.P. "I have tried to teach Warwara (Rod'ka's mother) to think things out for herself and form her own judgments. I wanted her to become a person with a broad outlook, with an unshakable faith in the future. But during the war years you instilled a blind faith in her which makes all thinking superfluous. This makes life dark and unscrutable for Warwara. We won the war. So why should Warwara analyse everything in order to discover why everything is due to God's mercy? Things were very difficult in Gumnishtshe during the war. Why? Warwara replies, 'God willed it so'. And that's the answer she gives to everything; it's intellectual obscurantism. She's like an animal, afraid of life, afraid of the wrath of God, afraid of the authorities, afraid of the rain, afraid of the cat that runs across the road. But you keep hammering into people, 'Be patient, submit, for everything is sent by God'. Humility, a lazy mind and fear are enough to turn people into submissive slaves. Intentionally or not, you have made people into ignorant, moral cretins, and that in the 20th century. Thank you for the little service which you rendered us. We too know how to deal justly with evil."

Father Dimitri made an uncertain gesture with his hands for sole reply. Then he said with dignity, "We don't force anyone to accept the Orthodox faith. But it is our duty not to conceal our beliefs."

P.P. "If you did force people, our discussion would be simpler! It is already enough that you exist. However you may pretend, however you may appease your conscience by maintaining that your religious beliefs are compatible with the good that we do, I can tell you that the future holds nothing in store for you but oblivion. You mustn't take that personally..."

"Who can say", replied Father Dimitri. "Many people have found their way to God since the war, and who knows what the future may hold?"

P.P. "That's just like you, Father Dimitri. You call yourself a crusader working for good, but you are only waiting for a national disaster which might be to your advantage. Isn't it true?"

"This time Father Dimitri said nothing in reply. He merely shook his head and turned away. The rest of the way was traversed in silence."

The following article by Hieromonach Johannes Kotliarevsky shows how the Russian Orthodox Church sees and explains the Christian way of life (abbreviated).

The Christian Path
by Hieromonach Johannes Kotliarevsky

St. John the Apostle says in his first Epistle (4:8), "he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love."

Our Lord Jesus Christ describes the nature of man's love for God and for his neighbour as follows (Matt. 22: 36-40): "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." He is referring here not only to love for God and man, but also to love of oneself, although this is not expressly mentioned. The love one has for oneself is the norm by which love of one's neighbour is assessed. One's love for oneself must be controlled and restricted, otherwise it degenerates into sinful egoism.

Loving God means that man must strain every nerve to fix the whole power of his affections, his soul and his mind upon God ...

Man's love for God must be so deep and wide that, as Maxim the Confessor said, "the man who loves God cannot help loving other people as himself."

If God is the Father of all men, then they are brothers! That is why St. John says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

How is this love for God expressed? It is expressed in reverence. It is a combination of a presentiment of God, the soul's conception of God, and the faith which can bring man to walk in the truth and strive to do God's will.

Faith is either a living faith, or it is dead. A dead faith confines itself to affirming that God exists. It draws no conclusions from this affirmation, because there is nothing to incite it to serve God. But even a dead faith may make a man tremble before God: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well, the devils also believe, and tremble." (James 2: 19)

The fruit of faith is right spiritual action by man, which is the beginning of the Christian way of life ... This is described in the confessional writing "Dobrotoliubie" of the Russian Church ...

Christianity is ... not merely a collection of Christian rules of life. It proclaims a personal God who is worshipped in three aspects. Christianity is faith in the crucified and risen Christ, and its ultimate aim is readiness to receive the Holy Spirit. On this point the "Dobrotoliubie" says the same as Makarius the Great: "Without God's Spirit the soul is dead. That is why it was necessary for Christ to come into the world, in order to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit." ("Dobrotoliubie", Volume I, p. 115)

St. Serafim of Sarov, in his well-known discussion with Motovilif also speaks of the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as the highest goal of the Christian life. Keeping commandments and following ethical rules are not aims in themselves; they are only a means of

achieving that highest goal. The Christian therefore needs spiritual reflection in order to understand the commandments aright, especially in their application to loving one's neighbour and doing good works.

Out of the whole wealth of spiritual experience the Christian selects what appeals most to his own spirit. He does this gradually, advancing from one grade to the next. It is impossible to grasp everything at once. One person derives most benefit from practical help to his neighbour; another from isolation and prayer for the world. But both must be based on a loving faith in God. Christ's commandments must be carried out because of our love for him. That is why every saint is quite different.

The Gospel is our guide. But a merely literal understanding of that powerful Book may lead to sectarianism and empty erudition, because some of its commandments appear to contradict one another if one does not penetrate deeply enough to grasp its real meaning. For instance, Matt. 6: 3 says, "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth", whereas Matt. 5: 16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." These sayings do not contradict one another unless taken literally. According to the first, people are not to attach too much importance to their own good works, but to do them secretly and not make a show of them in public. In the second saying, however, the disciples are urged to behave in such a way that their whole lives may be illumined by the light of Christian truth, and so that their words and actions convince those around them that they are not performed for their own glory, but for the glory of God their Father.

An expression like "in the fear of God" is a disagreeable blow to our proud self-confidence; we are not used to it. This fear "humiliates us and is incompatible with our freedom; it is essentially foreign to the nature of love." Has not St. John said, "Perfect love casteth out fear: (I. John 4 : 18) because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." The unconscious, passive acceptance of God's grace is one thing. A conscious, active, thankful acceptance of it as a support and stronghold is quite a different matter.

Man's self-knowledge leads him to perceive his own weakness. He knows that "in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." (Rom. 7: 18) This is where grace comes to man's aid. It may be imparted even without being sought, as in the case of Paul (then Saul) on the road to Damascus, where he planned to persecute the Christians, or in the case of children at baptism in response to the prayers of the church or of the godparents. Later on, after God has taken the person under His spiritual discipline by giving him a share in His grace, He insists that man should desire and strive for grace.

The direct, living contact between man and God is effected through prayer. Without prayer there never has been, never is and never will be any religion...

The power of the prayers offered by the Church is no secret to the heart of Christians. Even if my own prayers are spasmodic, disconnected and feeble, they are strengthened by the prayers of my fellow-Christians. For "where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, there he is in the midst of them."

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